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### State-Sponsored Disinformation about Uyghurs: Euphemism as Genocide Denial

Greg Voce

*Binghamton University--SUNY*

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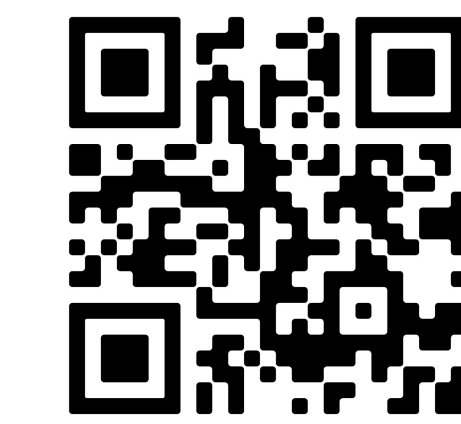
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# State-Sponsored Disinformation about Uyghurs: Euphemism as Genocide Denial



## Processes of Genocide Denial

My project focuses on how the Chinese government, or the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), denies genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Uyghur ethnic minority in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XUAR) through **euphemisms**. Euphemistic language constitutes the field of disinformation studies, as it can be intentionally false when it obscures and softens criminally violent realities. First, the CCP has used the processes of **knowledge production** to create negative public perceptions of the Uyghur population by falsely labeling them as terrorists. As a result of harmful knowledge production, the CCP has pushed euphemistic counterterrorism narratives that have led to further discrimination, policy solutions justifying mass detention, and rhetoric about employment and economic measures to relieve poverty. Through euphemisms, the CCP dismisses allegations of genocide under the false notion that the government is improving the region.

## The CCP's So-called Fight against Violent Extremism

Through the ambiguity of the Global War on Terror and the rise of Islamophobia, along with the subjectivity of the term **terrorism**, the CCP gained international recognition of a 'Uyghur terrorist threat'. Another component supporting the euphemistic language of the CCP is knowledge production through **self-fulfilling prophecies** to manipulate the domestic population into having racist and Islamophobic attitudes toward Uyghurs. Contrary to CCP rhetoric, there is no evidence of widespread terrorism (Uyghur Human Rights Project, 7). When Uyghurs have expressed grievances through protest or violence, like during the Urumqi riots in 2009, the government has misleadingly labeled all such actions as terrorism (Roberts, 146 & 147). The purposeful mischaracterization of Uyghurs as terrorists allows the government to euphemize ethnic cleansing and genocide in detention centers and forced labor policies through pretenseful claims of combatting terrorism.

## 'Voluntary Vocational Training Centers' for extremist 're-education'

Also, the Chinese government continued to push even harsher euphemistic policies for integration, culminating with the construction of detention centers. The CCP claims detention facilities are 'voluntary' and 'vocational training institutions' to fight extremism and separatism and help employ Uyghurs (Uyghur Human Rights Project, 7). However, conglomerations of leaked government documents, such as the China Cables and Xinjiang Police Files, prove that Uyghurs are arbitrarily detained and subject to indoctrination and high surveillance, revealing that the camps are not 'voluntary.' Many Uyghurs who have escaped have also reported torture and abuse; for example, one woman recounted that guards hit them on the head with wooden sticks for using the bathroom for too long (Lehr & Bechrakis, 22). Finally, as an effort to control the population, forced sterilization has occurred, which directly violates international laws on **genocide** (Waller & Salazar Albornoz, 102). Because of human rights abuses and genocidal practices, the detention centers are not 'voluntary' places for 'vocational training' and weeding out violent extremism; instead, they are places to eradicate the Uyghur culture and people.

## Forced Labor Under the Name of 'Poverty Alleviation'

Lastly, the government uses euphemisms, such as 'poverty alleviation' and 'Xinjiang aid,' further veiling its colonial desires to consolidate power over the XUAR and to exterminate the Uyghur identity. The government transfers Uyghurs who have 'graduated' from detention centers to factories across China for 'employment;' Many of these factories supply Western companies, such as Nike, Adidas, and Apple (Xiuzhong Xu et al, 4). Like the detention facilities, Uyghurs receive patriotic lessons after work days, and any expression of their Islamic faith is not allowed (Xiuzhong Xu et al, 6). Another aspect of 'poverty alleviation' policies is that the government forces Uyghur farmers in the Southern rural areas of the XUAR to surrender their land to the government only to work under Han Chinese-owned plantations. Not only are Uyghurs removed from their ancestral lands, but they are forced and trained to adopt new farming methods and crops, such as marigolds. (Murphy et al, 26 & 27). These policies are also coercive, as Uyghurs who refuse face the threat of internment or imprisonment, and they are paid little to nothing for their labor (Murphy et al, 7). Therefore, these policies are euphemistic, as they obscure the malicious intent of the government to eradicate the Uyghur culture.

## Genocide Denial in Disinformation Studies

Scholars often view denial as a byproduct of disinformation, but it is imperative to view it as disinformation in itself. Denial is central to the efforts of the CCP; the Chinese government uses euphemisms to dismiss allegations of human rights abuses while harmfully portraying the government as a benevolent force fighting poverty and terrorism. So far, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns of euphemistic rhetoric and policy characterizations have succeeded, as many people lack awareness of the Uyghur genocide or believe Chinese government disinformation. Incorporating genocide denial in disinformation studies would allow scholars to accentuate the harmfulness of the processes of genocide denial. It would also likely lead to more international scrutiny and overall awareness of genocide and genocide denial.

## Definitions

**Euphemism:** "the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant" (Merriam Webster)

**Knowledge Production-** " 'Knowledge' and even 'history' are produced by social and political actors and used to legitimize and validate social inequality." (Kuo & Marwick, 4)

**Terrorism-** "Non-state actors who deliberately target civilians for politically motivated violence," while "those who attack military, police, and state institutions for such purposes should be understood as engaged in guerrilla warfare." (Roberts, 13)

**Genocide-** According to the UN, "Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group" is a form of genocide, making forced sterilizations in the XUAR a genocidal practice (UN, 1).

**Self-fulfilling Prophecies-** "originating as a false assessment about a social problem that leads to social or policy actions that make the false assessment a reality." "Once this false assessment becomes a reality, it further justifies the actions that facilitated its existence." (Roberts, 164).

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The image above depicts Uyghurs in a detention center. Image Source: Xinjiang Police Files